

# Guide to the City of Milwaukee's Testing and Selection Process



Department of Employee Relations  
200 E. Wells Street, Room 706  
Milwaukee, WI 53202-3554

- General Office: (414) 286-3751
- TDD: (414) 286-2960
- Job Information Hotline: (414) 286-5555
- E-Mail: [StaffingInfo@milwaukee.gov](mailto:StaffingInfo@milwaukee.gov)
- Web site: [www.milwaukee.gov/jobs](http://www.milwaukee.gov/jobs)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this Guide is to orient you to the City's employee selection procedures and to improve your test-taking skills. The Department of Employee Relations uses job-related tests to measure an individual's ability to perform the job. Tests are competitive: higher scoring applicants have a greater chance of being selected because the knowledge, skills and abilities required to do well on the test are the same as those needed to perform successfully on the job.

The kinds of tests used to select City employees depend on the nature of a given job. For example, applicants for an accountant job may be rated on their training and experience and then take the written test. Applicants for an office assistant job take a written test and then a "performance" test in typing. Other applicants may be given oral tests by a panel of experts, while others must weld steel--it just depends on the job for which the opening exists. So there are four kinds of tests:

- **Training and Experience**
- **Written**
- **Performance**
- **Oral**

Both test questions and answers reflect the input of job incumbents, supervisors, managers, testing specialists and other people knowledgeable about the job and test construction (sometimes called "subject matter experts"). The kind of information these experts provide include the right and wrong ways of doing a task, the procedures and methods used, the technologies involved, critical aspects of the work, and the identification of tasks for which training is provided after a person is hired.

Written tests generally take from two to four hours to complete--this is to allow ample time to complete the entire test. If there is an additional test component such as a performance test, it is usually necessary to come back on another day to complete that part.

The Department of Employee Relations tries to provide test results within about 60 days – for some tests with large numbers of applicants, the time may be a little longer. If you pass the test(s), your name will be placed on an eligible list: you are eligible to be hired, but not guaranteed a position. Eligible lists are valid for at least 1 year and list candidates in order from highest to lowest passing score. Because of scheduling interviews and physical examinations, processing paperwork etc., the earliest a person may be hired after taking a test is about 30 days. If you change your address or phone number, please call our office at 414-286-3751 and let us know your new information; or send an email with the details to [staffinginfo@milwaukee.gov](mailto:staffinginfo@milwaukee.gov).

## **FILLING OUT THE APPLICATION**

Once you find a job that interests you and seems to fit your background, the next step is to fill out the application. *You must apply for a specific job title that is open at the time when you complete the application.* Since an application is the first part of the hiring process, it is important that you take the time to fill it out accurately and completely.

1. **Follow directions carefully** on the application so that your answers are correct and in the proper places. *Writing "See Resume" is **NOT** acceptable.*
2. **Answer all questions**, even if it means using, "Does not apply," or "N/A." Attach all required information, such as college transcripts. For example, if you are a veteran, make sure your Form DD214 is attached and the "Military Service" section of the application is completed.
3. **Check all questions and answers** for correctness and completeness.
4. **Complete the application before the filing deadline listed on the announcement to guarantee consideration.**

## **RATINGS OF TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE**

In ratings of training and experience, the background of the applicant is reviewed. Training and experience are evaluated in terms of their relationship to the job. This review provides a score that is used to determine a final ranking.

The information needed for the review is taken from the application and the training and experience questionnaire. It is important to fill out all of your application materials accurately and completely, but it is especially important when the test is a rating of training and experience. Remember that THE APPLICATION MATERIALS ARE PART OF THE ENTIRE TEST. Also, keep a copy of the application materials as a reference.

## **BEFORE TAKING A TEST**

You will be notified of:

- The time, date and place of the test
- The required materials to bring to the test (*picture identification, calculator, etc.*)
- How long you will be given to complete the test

Although our tests are job-related, the Department of Employee Relations has no study materials.

Ensure that you know how to get to the test site, have adequate transportation (correct fare for the bus or money for parking if you're driving), and arrive early at the test site. Check to see what you must bring/may bring to the testing session. Please bring a form of picture identification in order to be admitted to the test.

As long as it will not be a distraction, bring a watch to keep track of the time. Also, if you have a question before or during a test, ask the monitor (the person in charge of the test). Asking another examinee might be interpreted as cheating. Persons who receive unauthorized help will be disqualified. Monitors are not allowed to give the meaning of test questions or words.

# **TAKING A WRITTEN TEST**

## **WRITTEN TEST READING REQUIREMENTS**

The written tests administered by the City of Milwaukee are from a type known as “job knowledge tests.” For example, you might be required to read and answer questions about written passages that are taken from materials that you would come across on the job. By basing the test on job knowledge and job materials, the reading level of the test matches that required on the job.

There are typically three different types of questions used on City tests:

### ***Multiple Choice***

Multiple choice test items are usually comprised of a short phrase or question, called a stem, followed by 3-5 choices (words, phrases, numbers, etc.) which might complete the stem. Only one of the choices is correct for a particular question: the “best” answer. We stress “particular question” because a given choice may be incorrect for one question, yet the best answer for another. The other choices, which are incorrect for a particular question, are called distracters.

Related test question types are matching (a list of stems is matched with a list of choices) and true/false. Since these types of questions are similar to multiple choice, they will not be treated separately.

Good strategies include READING ALL THE CHOICES, even if you think you know the correct answer--sometimes the question is looking for the “most correct” answer. Similarly, do not eliminate a choice because you are unfamiliar with the wording. One of the best tips we can give you is that...

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*If you do not know the answer to a question on a multiple choice test, try to eliminate as many of the distracters as you can, as this will increase your chances of getting the correct answer.*

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Some examinees benefit by looking over the entire test and completing the easiest questions first. In this way, they may be able to avoid wasting time on a more difficult question that has the same point value as an easier one. However, skipping around may encourage clerical errors, frustration if several questions remain after an initial run-through, etc. Regardless, it is important to manage your time, to keep progressing and to maintain a positive attitude.

Do not “read into” the questions. Each question and choice for answer must be evaluated on its own merit: the correct choice is the one that is most workable for the situation described. Analyze questions as if you were the employee. Even if two answers seem the same to you, **MARK ONLY ONE CHOICE ON YOUR ANSWER SHEET**; otherwise, you will not receive any credit for the question. **Erase completely if you change an answer**: do not cross out answers.

Finally, **DO NOT LEAVE ANY QUESTIONS BLANK--GUESS IF YOU MUST**, but only after making an honest attempt to answer the question. The vast majority of our tests is not speeded, and thereby has no penalty for guessing.

### ***Completion/Short Answer Questions and Essay Questions***

When you are required to provide short answers or write an essay on your test, read each question carefully to make sure you are interpreting it correctly. If you were required to read a longer section, it sometimes helps to refer back to the section for specific information relating to the question.

Be sure to take special notice of questions that have negatives or qualifiers in them such as “One step not found in this procedure is to...” or, “The statistics used most often for this purpose are...” When a question has more than one part, be sure to answer ALL of the parts. For example, you might be asked to “identify the problem...” and then to “suggest two ways to solve it.” Present solid information and supporting facts for any of your conclusions.

You are not expected to write answers worthy of a Pulitzer Prize, but answers full of incomplete ideas, spelling errors, etc., will not be scored as highly. Some people find it helpful to think about longer answers before beginning to write. Also, it may be helpful to outline or jot down notes about your response before beginning to write the essay/answer itself. Experts maintain that the best way to prepare for an essay test is to write essays. Also remember that longer answers are not necessarily better answers--there will often be a limit on how much you can write (e.g., one side of a page). Do not write up until the time limit: SET ASIDE TIME TO PROOFREAD YOUR ANSWER.

## TEST WISENESS

“Test Wiseness” refers to the idea that by taking many types of tests over time and/or receiving training on how to take tests, some people can answer questions correctly on a test (typically, multiple choice tests), by using information other than knowing the correct answer. Being test-wise may improve your chances of identifying a correct choice and aid in guessing. Note that **the Department of Employee Relations designs tests to measure job ability, not test-taking ability**. However, we have provided you with hints that will help for answering questions you may be struggling with to find answers.

The Department of Employee Relations makes no guarantees about the following clues/hints. These clues/hints come from several sources, and probably work best with classroom tests developed by less-than-careful teachers. Test-wise clues/hints, in no particular order, include:

- Look at the relationship between the stem and choices--sometimes, distracters don’t “match” the stem grammatically, or have no relationship to the stem.
- There may be words that mean the same in the stem and a choice--this may be the correct answer.
- Choices which have these words in them are often wrong (*i.e., are distracters*): always, never, no, none, all, every, merely, solely, impossible, necessarily, only and must.
- Choices that have these words in them are often correct answers: generally, may, often, perhaps, seldom, usually, most likely, probably.
- If two answer choices are the same, you might assume that they are both wrong and eliminate them.
- If two choices are opposites, one of them is probably the correct answer.
- Look for choices that are longer/more precise in meaning.
- Sometimes one item “gives away” the answer to another that comes later in the test.
- If the answer choices include a series of numbers, dates, lengths, sizes, etc., choose the middle value.
- If you have no idea about the correct answer for a number of questions, or are about to run out of time and have a number of blanks, consider picking one choice (*A or B or C, etc.*) and marking all of the remainder of the test using this one choice.

It is important that you understand that we provided the test-wiseness hints/clues above because several people already know them. WE MAKE NO GUARANTEES THAT THEY WILL WORK, especially on City tests. We DO recommend that you:

1. Listen to/read directions and follow them carefully.
2. Read ALL of the questions and answer each question on its own merit.
3. Budget your time.
4. Guess if you must: answer all questions unless wrong answers are penalized.
5. Check your answer sheet often to avoid clerical errors.
6. Do not write in the test booklet unless told to do so.
7. Allow time to check your answers for correctness and completeness one last time at the end of the session.

Few people correctly answer all of the questions in our tests, so do not get upset if you do not know some of the answers or if others finish before you. Budgeting your time well will allow you to work at your best pace.

## **A NOTE ON MATHEMATICS QUESTIONS**

The math problems that appear on City tests reflect the mathematics required to perform the job. In the vast majority of cases, the applicant should have the ability to add, subtract, multiply and divide whole numbers, fractions and decimals. Most often the mathematics questions are written to reflect job situations, such as having carpenters determine the correct length of a board that must be cut.

There are certain jobs where higher-level mathematics such as calculus or statistics may be tested, but these additional requirements will be listed on the job announcement. Often, more advanced mathematics knowledge is tested in the Training and Experience Ratings mentioned earlier. The Exam Date Letter will indicate if you may use/must bring a calculator.

The best ways to prepare for mathematics questions are to practice doing mathematics problems, much like the drills in elementary education. Converting fractions to decimals and vice versa seems to be a problem area for several examinees, so take care to learn these skills. Additionally, it helps to:

- Learn how to interpret tables, graphs, charts, maps, etc. if they are used on the job for which you are applying.
- Draw diagrams, graphs, etc. on scratch paper to help yourself determine the answer to questions.
- Keep track of the position of numbers--many mistakes occur by marking the correct number in the wrong place.
- Use the units of measurement consistently--you can derive the correct numbers, but still make errors by not paying attention to whether you are dealing with inches, ounces, minutes, etc.
- CHECK YOUR WORK!

If you are pressed for time, you may consider estimating an answer. For example,  $209 \times 392 = ?$  may take too long to multiply, but  $209 \times 392$  is:

- ROUGHLY the same as  $200 \times 400$  which equals 80,000, AND
- You know that  $2 \times 9 = 18$ , (The last two digits, multiplied), SO
- The correct answer is around 80,018+

So, check to see if there is an answer close to that (the actual answer is 81,928). Finally, even if you are permitted to use a calculator on your particular test, it is good practice to check your work because it is easy to press the wrong button on the calculator's keypad.

## **TAKING PERFORMANCE TESTS**

While written tests measure your knowledge of a job, performance tests are used to measure a person's ability or skill to perform a job. Examples of performance tests are typing/word processing tests for clerical jobs and building/woodworking tests for carpenters. You should carefully consider your physical condition before you participate in a performance test. Remember that reasonable accommodations requested by qualified individuals with disabilities will be made in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

In performance tests, the required skill or ability demonstrated in a realistic setting, using the actual techniques, materials, equipment and personnel involved in the job. A performance test closely resembles parts of the job itself.

Job incumbents, supervisors and other subject-matter experts develop tests. Performance tests are no exception.

Subject matter experts help decide the content, administration guidelines, time limits and so on. They often observe and “grade” the performance of the applicant. In a performance test, you may be judged not only by the end product of your work, but also by the way in which you go about doing your work. You will be informed of the test location, time, required materials, etc. Most often, the performance test is administered a few weeks after the written test.

Be sure to dress appropriately for the performance test. In the exam date letter, you will be told if you are required to wear a certain type of clothing, shoes, gloves, etc. to the performance test.

The best way to prepare for a performance test is to prepare for the job. Some skills, such as typing, may be improved with daily practice on a typewriter or computer. Others, such as turning stock on a lathe may need more time to improve, as well as some rather expensive equipment. As with written tests, some performance tests take a number of hours to complete, so allow enough time in your daily schedule to finish the entire test.

## **TAKING ORAL TESTS**

Oral tests are administered when the job requirements indicate that certain communications and interpersonal skills are particularly important for successful performance. These skills are often as important as specific technical knowledge and are commonly evaluated by measures other than written tests. The kind of oral test used most often is the “oral board.” In this test, a person is “interviewed” before a panel of special examiners who are authorities in their field, and often not employed by the department in which the job opening occurs.

However, an oral test is more than a job interview. There is more structure in that all candidates are asked the same questions in the same order, answers/rating scales are provided in advance and ratings are made independently by a panel of raters and combined later. You will receive a grade in the oral test just as you would in a written test. Oral tests are usually recorded simply to keep a record of the examination.

### **Preparing for an Oral Test**

Following are a few tips on preparing for and completing oral tests. Your goal is to be **prepared** for the test and to present yourself in a **positive manner**.

- **Find out about the job.** Read the job announcement carefully. You might also consider going to the public library to use references such as The Dictionary of Occupational Titles or The Occupational Outlook Handbook.
- **Know your qualifications.** The oral board members will be asking you some questions about former jobs and experiences. What skills, experience, training or talents help qualify you for this job? Which of the job duties listed on the announcement have you performed on previous jobs? Which personal attributes make you interested in or qualified to do this job? It’s a good idea to write these types of things down as you think of them so that you can review this information.
- **Anticipate questions related to the job that might be asked.** Types of questions include knowledge of the job, solving problems, organizational (How would you do this?), pressure-handling (If this accident/error occurred, what you would do?), and situational (You are the supervisor and an employee refuses to complete an assignment...).
- **Dress neatly and appropriately.** You do not get a second chance to make a good first impression--you do not want to distract the board with your appearance.
- **Arrive for the test early/on time.**

While you are waiting to be called to the oral exam room, try to relax. If you have extra time, take a few deep breaths; review your “short list” of notes, etc.

### **During the Oral Test**

The examiners want to know your good points and how you are qualified for the job. The chances are that they probably don't know much about you and have only briefly seen your application. Therefore, it is imperative that you answer all of their questions completely.

- **Sell yourself.** Concentrate on the positive things you have to offer, not the negative. Avoid the common mistake of saying negative things about former jobs, co-workers, supervisors, etc.
- **Listen carefully to the questions and think before answering.** Do not feel that you must start talking immediately after the question to fill the silence. Among other things, the interviewers are judging if you can present a point of view and defend it, so they appreciate a well-conceived answer.
- **Answer each question completely and clearly.** The board is limited to asking a certain set of questions, so it is up to you to give them all the information they need to see if you are qualified for the job. Your ability to communicate is a major factor in oral tests--if the board cannot hear or understand you, your co-workers probably will not either.
- **Be complete and clear, BUT NOT LONG-WINDED.** A long, wordy answer is not better than a short, complete and concise answer. Explain any technical jargon you might use. Let the board lead the discussion.
- **Ask questions when appropriate.** Such as when you do not understand a question or need clarification of a statement. The interviewers usually take turns asking questions, so be prepared for different voices, inflections, etc.
- **Be alert, cheerful and interested in the interview and job.** Avoid questions on benefits, vacations, etc. which will be explained to you at a later time.
- **Maintain good eye contact.** If you are uncomfortable about looking people in the eye, try focusing on the interviewer's nose or forehead.

### **After the Oral Test**

The board will let you know when the test is over. You may still have the chance to aid your cause, especially if they ask if you have any final questions or comments.

- Indicate your interest in the position again. This is your golden opportunity to recap your qualifications, indicate your interest in the job, and add important information that may have been missed earlier.
- Thank the board when finished. They have volunteered their time to help with the evaluation of candidates. Let them know that you appreciate their efforts.

## **AFTER ALL OF THE TESTS**

After you have completed all of the tests, you will be notified by mail as to how you did on the examination. You will receive your test score at this time: a passing score on most civil service examinations is a grade of 70 or higher. The names of applicants who pass are placed on an eligible list, which lists the applicants based on the order of their scores, from highest to lowest. If the job for which you are applying required more than one test component (e.g., written and performance), you must pass all components separately and receive an overall combined grade of 70 or more.

**NOTE:** If an applicant successfully completes the process just described, the applicant's name will be placed on an eligible list. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that you will be selected because there will be a number of people eligible to be hired for any given vacancy.

**GOOD LUCK IN YOUR JOB SEARCH!**